

herbs at a glance

Licorice Root

This fact sheet provides basic information about licorice root—common names, uses, potential side effects, and resources for more information. Most licorice is grown in Greece, Turkey, and Asia. Licorice contains a compound called glycyrrhizin (or glycyrrhizic acid). Licorice has a long history of medicinal use in both Eastern and Western systems of medicine.

Common Names—licorice root, licorice, liquorice, sweet root, gan zao (Chinese licorice)

Latin Names—*Glycyrrhiza glabra*, *Glycyrrhiza uralensis* (Chinese licorice)

What It Is Used For

Licorice root has been used as a dietary supplement for stomach ulcers, bronchitis, and sore throat, as well as infections caused by viruses, such as hepatitis.

How It Is Used

- Peeled licorice root is available in dried and powdered forms.
- Licorice root is available as capsules, tablets, and liquid extracts.
- Licorice can be found with glycyrrhizin removed; the product is called DGL (for “deglycyrrhized licorice”).

What the Science Says

- An injectable form of licorice extract—not available in the United States—has been shown to have beneficial effects against hepatitis C in clinical trials. There are no reliable data on oral forms of licorice for hepatitis C. More research is needed before reaching any conclusions.
- There are not enough reliable data to determine whether licorice is effective for any condition.

Side Effects and Cautions

- In large amounts, licorice containing glycyrrhizin can cause high blood pressure, salt and water retention, and low potassium levels, which could lead to heart problems. DGL products are thought to cause fewer side effects.
- The safety of using licorice as a supplement for more than 4 to 6 weeks has not been thoroughly studied.

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- Taking licorice together with diuretics (water pills), corticosteroids, or other medicines that reduce the body's potassium levels could cause dangerously low potassium levels.
- People with heart disease or high blood pressure should be cautious about using licorice.
- When taken in large amounts, licorice can affect the body's levels of a hormone called cortisol and related steroid drugs, such as prednisone.
- Pregnant women should avoid using licorice as a supplement or consuming large amounts of licorice as food, as some research suggests it could increase the risk of preterm labor.
- Tell all your health care providers about any complementary and alternative practices you use. Give them a full picture of what you do to manage your health. This will help ensure coordinated and safe care. For tips about talking with your health care providers about CAM, see NCCAM's Time to Talk campaign at nccam.nih.gov/timetotalk/.

Sources

Licorice. Natural Medicines Comprehensive Database Web site. Accessed at www.naturaldatabase.com on July 15, 2009.

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Licorice root. In: Blumenthal M, Goldberg A, Brinckman J, eds. *Herbal Medicine: Expanded Commission E Monographs*. Newton, MA: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins; 2000:233-239.

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For More Information

Visit the NCCAM Web site at nccam.nih.gov and view *Using Dietary Supplements Wisely* (nccam.nih.gov/health/supplements/wiseuse.htm).

NCCAM Clearinghouse

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Web site: nccam.nih.gov/research/camonpubmed/

NIH Office of Dietary Supplements

Web site: www.ods.od.nih.gov

NIH National Library of Medicine's MedlinePlus

Licorice Root Listing: www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/druginfo/natural/patient-licorice.html

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